

# Abraham Lincoln.

By JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

THESE paragraphs, which sum up with unerring insight the character of Lincoln, were, with the exception of the last two, written by Mr. Lowell in 1864. When they were written, the nation had not yet measured the full greatness of the extraordinary man who ruled it; but Lowell, with that fine perception which belongs to genius, penetrated to the very heart of the truth and saw with perfect clearness what was still hidden from so many of his countrymen. The final paragraphs were added by him after President Lincoln's death, and the whole essay was published as one of the papers in "My Study Windows." No estimate of Lincoln contains within the same compass so accurate a delineation of his character.

ONE of the things particularly admirable in the public utterances of President Lincoln is a certain tone of familiar dignity, which, while it is perhaps the most difficult attainment of mere style, is also no doubtful indication of personal character. There must be something essentially noble in an elective ruler who can descend to the level of confidential ease without losing respect, something very manly in one who can break through the etiquette of his conventional rank and trust himself to the reason and intelligence of those who have elected him.

No higher compliment was ever paid to a nation than the simple confidence, the fireside plainness, with which Mr. Lincoln always addresses himself to the reason of the American people. This was, indeed, a true democrat, who grounded himself on the assumption that a democracy can think. "Come, let us reason about this matter," has been the tone of all his addresses to the people; and accordingly we have never had a chief magistrate who so won to himself the love, and at the same time the judgment, of his countrymen. To us, that simple confidence of his in the right-mindedness of his fellow men is very touching, and its success is as strong

an argument as we have ever seen in favor of the theory that men can govern themselves. He never appeals to any vulgar sentiment; he never alludes to the humbleness of his origin. It probably never occurred to him, indeed, that there was anything higher to start from than manhood; and he put himself on a level with those he addressed, not by going down to them, but only by taking it for granted that they had brains and would come up to a common ground of reason.

In an article lately printed, Mr. Bayard Taylor mentions the striking fact that in the foulest dens of the Five Points he found the portrait of Lincoln. The wretched population that made its hive there threw all its votes and more against him, and yet paid this instinctive tribute to the sweet humanity of his nature. Their ignorance sold its vote and took its money, but all that was left of manhood in them recognized its saint and martyr.

Mr. Lincoln is not in the habit of saying, "This is *my* opinion, or *my* theory," but, "This is the conclusion to which, in my judgment, the time has come, and to which, accordingly, the sooner we come the better for us." His policy has been the policy of public opinion based on adequate discussion and on a timely recognition of the influence of passing

events in shaping the features of events to come.

#### How Abraham Lincoln Said "I."

One secret of Mr. Lincoln's remarkable success in captivating the popular mind is undoubtedly an unconsciousness of self which enables him, though under the necessity of constantly using the capital *I*, to do it without any suggestion of egoism. There is no single vowel which men's mouths can pronounce with such difference of effect. That which one shall hide away, as it were, behind the substance of his discourse, or, if he bring it to the front, shall use merely to give an agreeable accent of individuality to what he says, another shall make an offensive challenge to the self-satisfaction of all his hearers and an unwarranted intrusion upon each man's sense of personal importance, irritating every pore of his vanity, like a dry northeast wind, to a goose-flesh of opposition and hostility. Mr. Lincoln has never studied Quintilian; but he has, in the earnest simplicity and unaffected Americanism of his own character, one art of oratory worth all the rest. He forgets himself so entirely in his object as to give his *I* the sympathetic and persuasive effect of *We* with the great body of his countrymen. Homely, dispassionate, showing all the rough-edged process of his thought as it goes along, yet arriving at his conclusions with an honest kind of every-day logic, he is so eminently our representative man that when he speaks it seems as if the people were listening to their own thinking aloud.

The dignity of his thought owes nothing to any ceremonial garb of words, but

to the manly movement that comes of settled purpose and an energy of reason that knows not what rhetoric means. He has always addressed the intelligence of men, never their prejudice, their passion, or their ignorance.

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On the day of his death, this simple Western attorney, who according to one party was a vulgar joker, and whom the doctrinaires among his own supporters accused of wanting every element of statesmanship, was the most absolute ruler in Christendom, and this solely by the hold his good-humored sagacity had laid on the hearts and understandings of his countrymen. Nor was this all; for it appeared that he had drawn the great majority, not only of his fellow citizens, but of all mankind also, to his side. So strong and so persuasive is honest manliness without a single quality of romance or unreal sentiment to help it!

A civilian during times of the most captivating military achievement, awkward, with no skill in the lower technicalities of manners, he left behind him a fame beyond that of any conqueror, the memory of a grace higher than that of outward person, and of a gentlemanliness deeper than mere breeding. Never, before that startled April morning, did such multitudes of men shed tears for the death of one they had never seen, as if with him a friendly presence had been taken away from their lives, leaving them colder and darker. Never was funeral panegyric so eloquent as the silent look of sympathy which strangers exchanged when they met on that day. Their common manhood had lost a kinsman.

## INCOMPATIBILITY.

BY SMITH ELY, MAYOR OF NEW YORK 1877-1878.

THEY had been mates for months,  
and he was very tired  
Of daily magpie tongue and dis-  
approving eyes;  
And then, of course, he sees a bright, al-  
luring bird  
With glossy plumage floating round  
the perfumed skies.

Unhappy man, thus doubly doomed, to  
whom so much  
Of both Prometheus and Tantalus is  
given;  
The vulture tears his heart while just be-  
yond his clutch  
Hovers the sweet-voiced glad-eyed  
mocking bird of Heaven.